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News Release

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Surface water pesticide monitoring results generally positive

OLYMPIA – The amount of pesticides in several salmon-bearing streams continues to be low and generally within acceptable levels, according to the latest results of a three-year study.

The second-year results of the study were released today by the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), which contracted with the state Department of Ecology to study pesticide residues in salmon-bearing streams. Two index watersheds representing agricultural and urban land-use patterns were chosen for the study. Samples were taken weekly from March through October 2004 at all downstream sites and every other week at two, upstream sites.

Surface waters were sampled for 144 chemicals; including 87 currently registered pesticides, pesticide breakdown products and a number of historically used, but now banned pesticides, such as DDT. Overall, the herbicide 2,4-D was the most commonly detected pesticide in the agricultural watersheds. The herbicide dichlobenil was the most commonly detected pesticide in the urban watershed. While these were the most frequently detected, they never approached levels of concern, Moran said.

Although the 2004 study found fewer pesticides in the water than the year before, there was a single detection of malathion that was above expected levels at one of the agricultural sample sites.

"The goal of this monitoring program is to give us accurate information about the presence of pesticides in salmon-bearing streams," said Bridget Moran, manager of WSDA's Endangered Species Program. "In 2004 we did see one high detection of malathion, which is a potential concern. As a result, we're currently evaluating the data to determine the possible reasons for this."

Despite the one, significant detection, WSDA officials were generally pleased with the second-year results. The number of pesticides found in the agricultural sites dropped from 46 in 2003 to 37 in 2004. The number of pesticides in the urban basin went from 17 in 2003 to eight in 2004.

The water monitoring program is in its final year of the three year study cycle. At the end of the three years, Moran said WSDA officials will assess the future direction for the program. For more information about the study results, visit the WSDA Web site at http://agr.wa.gov/PestFert/EnvResources/SWM/default.htm.

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